

Lee High School seniors make 114 on-the-spot college decisions

For the past seven years, the University of North Florida's School Counseling Program has partnered with schools in Duval County to host Instant Decision Day in an effort to bring colleges to many first generation students who may otherwise not apply for college.

On Dec. 5, 32 students from Robert E. Lee High School interviewed with college representatives and received an admissions decision as well as scholarship offers on the spot.

The result was a total of 114 acceptances from 15 Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and Rhode Island colleges and universities, and renewable scholarships in the amount of \$2,702,228. Renewable scholarships are awards students can renew during their four years of college enrollment, as opposed to one-time awards.



A representative from Johnson & Wales University guides Lee senior Cey'wan Herah through the admissions process during Instant Decision Day.

Local participating colleges and universities included UNF, as well as Edward Waters College, Florida State College at Jacksonville, Jacksonville University, and the Jacksonville campus of Barry University.

Last year, when participating for the first time in Instant Decision Day, 28 Lee students came away with 65 acceptance letters with \$618,000 in scholarships.

Ortega schools bring students together in reading program

St. Mark's Episcopal Day School fifth-grade students celebrated the Christmas holidays with their kindergarten buddies across the street at Ortega Elementary School.

During their December visit, in addition to reading books together, the fifth-graders gave their buddies handmade Mexican yarn dolls. The doll gifts were inspired through the novel study of "Esperanza Rising," by Pam Muñoz Ryan.

The students in this special buddy program meet every month throughout the school year to read together.



St. Mark's Episcopal Day School student McRae Busey, right, with her kindergarten buddy at Ortega Elementary School.

UNF senior honored for exceptional environmental service

Nikki Adams, a senior at The University of North Florida, was honored for her outstanding record of volunteerism during fall commencement Dec. 8, when she graduated with a bachelor's degree in biology. She was recognized as the recipient of the Senior Service Award, which is presented to a graduating senior for outstanding volunteer service to the University or community by the UNF Alumni Association.

Adams, who grew up in Riverside and attended the Douglas Anderson School of the Arts, realized she could spark change and awareness through volunteerism and found she could accomplish this through the University's Environmental Center, where she became deeply involved with the Center's student-led organization, the Environmental Center Student Coalition. Adams served as club president last fall and facilitated open discussions with students about environmental problems and ways in which they could enact change.

Through the UNF Environmental Center, Adams began to participate in activities that also helped improve the Northeast Florida community by volunteering at clean-up events organized by the St. Johns Riverkeeper, North Florida Land Trust and Groundwork Jax. By "getting down in the dirt" with a team of impassioned individuals, she was able to work as part of a team committed to making a positive, visual change.

Additionally, Adams has interned with the Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve as well as the National Park Service



Nikki Adams

and volunteered with the North Florida Land Trust's Team Terrapin, where she contributed to a database that served to quantify the amount of diamondback terrapins present in the marshes on Big Talbot Island. She's also volunteered with The Girls Gone Green, the U.S. Green Building Council, Dreams Come True and Rising Tides Young Professionals group.

Students display artistic talents at Winter Recital

Ruth N. Upson Elementary School students presented their Winter Recital in December with performances by The Upson Chorus and the Upson Percussion Ensemble under the direction of music director Scott Shores.

The ensemble featured three numbers including "Silver Bells." The chorus sang four songs including "Jingle Bell Rock."

The evening began with the Cathedral Arts Dance Teams performing "Carol of the Bells" under the direction of Dewitt Cooper.

Arts specialist Kimberly Hamby exhibited work by the third through fifth grades as part of the night's festivities. Refreshments were available through the Upson Safety Patrol.

"There were wonderful performances and we would like to thank the students, families, teachers and staff for coming out tonight and supporting our music, art and dance programs," said Yvonne Spinner, principal.



Cathedral Arts Dance team performing "Carol of the Bells"



The Upson Percussion Ensemble played three songs at the Winter Recital.

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